

**Remarks on Clean Water Legislation**  
*May 30, 1995*

Thank you very much. This country would be better off if we had a few more little old ladies in tennis shoes, don't you think, like Minny Pohlmann? [Applause] Thank you, Minny, for your introduction, and more importantly, thank you for the many years of work you have done to clean up the Potomac and to set an example about responsible environmentalism.

Secretary Babbitt; Administrator Browner; to the CEQ Chairman, Katie McGinty; George Frampton; Bob Stanton; Mike Brown; to Neal Fitzpatrick, the conservation director of the Audubon Naturalist Society; and the two young people who came up with me, Hannah and Michael—where are they, where are the young people who were with me? Thank you very much. And to all the schoolchildren who are here—I wish you could have heard what they were saying over there as I was looking at some of the species that live in this water, because it is still not as pure as it ought to be, and reading the sign over there. Have you all read the sign on the creek? “Fish from these waters contain PCB's. Do not eat catfish, carp, or eel from these waters. You may eat a half a pound per month of largemouth bass or a half a pound per week of sunfish or other fish. Choose to eat younger and smaller fish of legal size. Always skin the fish, trim away the fat, and cook so that it drains away. The practice of catch and release is encouraged. Swimming is prohibited still due to high levels of bacteria.”

To those who say we have nothing more to do to clean up America's waterways, I urge them to come here to Pierce Mill and read the sign.

We still have a lot of work to do on this, the most simple necessity of our lives, water. Pierce Mill and this part of Rock Creek Park are very important in the history of our country. Teddy Roosevelt used to come here to walk and to look at the creek, to get a little exercise.

I admire Teddy Roosevelt for many reasons, but one of the most important is that he taught us the necessity of preserving our natural resources and protecting our natural

world. He established the National Wildlife Refuges. The Forest Service grew in size and vision under his leadership. His actions led to the creation of the National Park Service, which takes care of this very park. This great Republican President taught us that it would be foolhardy and spendthrift to try to play politics with our environmental treasures. Caring for our land wasn't just for Democrats or just for Republicans, it was an American cause and just plain common sense. That was true at the beginning of this century when Teddy Roosevelt was President; it's even more true at the end of this century as we look toward a new millennium.

Roosevelt's legacy of nonpartisanship on the environment extended throughout most of this century. It was under another Republican President, Richard Nixon, that we created the Environmental Protection Agency, passed the Clean Water Act, and created the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

For a long time, therefore, Americans have stood as one in saying no to things like dirty water and yes to giving our children an environment as unspoiled as their hopes and dreams. It is because of this commitment on the part of millions of Americans of both parties and all races and ethnic backgrounds, people from every region of our country and all walks of economic life, that last week you were able to take your children—last weekend—to a beach that was clean or a lake that was full of fish or a river that was safe to swim in. And that's why I want to talk to you about some of the things that are going on now that present a threat to that way of life.

Some Members of the new Congress, operating with major industry lobbyists, have come up with a bill that would roll back a quarter-century of bipartisan progress in public health and environmental protection. The bill would let polluted water back into our lives. It would increase the threat of improperly treated sewage being released into our waters. The sewage could then wash up on our beaches, maybe on the very beach where you taught your children to swim.

Members of Congress who support this legislation actually have the nerve to call their bill the “Clean Water Act.” And the House

of Representatives actually passed it just before the Memorial Day weekend. But newspapers all over America are calling it the dirty water act. And it won't get past my desk.

We have worked as one people for 25 years—as one people for 25 years—across party lines to make our environment safer and cleaner. We cannot turn away from it now. There is still more to be done, not less.

Let me tell you about the true Clean Water Act, the one we have in place now, the one I'm going to use the power of the Presidency to protect. Every year the real Clean Water Act cleans more than a billion pounds of toxic pollutants from our water. Every year it keeps 900 million tons of sewage out of our rivers, lakes, and streams. In human terms, it keeps poisons out of your child's evening bath and bedtime glass of water.

Once a river of ours was so polluted that it actually caught fire. Thanks to that act, that doesn't happen anymore. The story used to be that if you fell into the Potomac, which this stream runs into, you had to go to a doctor and get shots to protect yourself from disease. Because of the genuine Clean Water Act, that's on its way to being a dark and distant memory. Today the Potomac has rebounded. And many parts of it are safe for fishing and swimming.

Under the new bill in Congress all this could change. Instead of getting progressively cleaner, our water quality would go straight down the drain. We've heard all about beaches that have had to be shut down because of water waste and syringes on the sand. Some of us have been unlucky enough to have that experience firsthand.

The House bill would only increase this risk. Under its provisions, many coastal cities would be able to dump inadequately treated sewage and industrial waste into the ocean, increasing your family's chances of finding waste in the water when you're swimming or boating.

But this fight isn't just about how clean the water is when you're on vacation. It's also about the water that you drink every day, the water that you bathe in, the water that you use at home, the water that keeps you and your children and all of us alive.

Americans have a right to expect that our water will be the cleanest in the world. Clean water is essential to the security our people deserve, the safety that comes from knowing that the environment we live in won't make us sick. With all the other changes and challenges that the American people have to confront in the world today, they sure should not have to worry about the quality of their water. That is one uncertainty that even in this rapidly changing world we ought to be able to remove from every family in the United States of America.

This House bill would put the cleanliness and safety of our water at risk. Industries in our country use roughly 70,000 pollutants, chemicals, and other material that can poison water if they're not controlled properly. This bill would make it easier for those poisons to find their way into our water.

Current law requires that we use the best achievable technology to keep our water clean and safe. Amazingly, the House bill actually says we don't need to bother with the best technology; it says that second or even third best is good enough. That's crazy. There's no reason on Earth why Americans should have to settle for anything less than the best when it comes to keeping our water safe and pure.

Now, here's the part that really gets to me. This bill would also postpone, perhaps indefinitely, action against some of the suspected sources of cryptosporidium in drinking water. Now, we all remember what that is. That's the deadly bacteria that contaminated Milwaukee's water supply just 2 years ago. One hundred people died from drinking it; thousands more fell ill. For more than a week, the people of Milwaukee were terrified to brush their teeth, make coffee, use ice cubes, even wash their clothes in their own city's water supply. If you can believe it, this bill that passed the House would prevent us from doing everything in our power to make sure that this never happens again.

Who could possibly think up such a bill? Well, the lawyers and the lobbyists who represent the polluters who wrote the bill. They were invited into the back rooms of what once was your Congress to write a bill that provides loopholes for their industries. They want to make it possible for their companies

to get around the standards that are designed to protect us all. If the bill becomes law, that's exactly what will happen.

But it won't. It won't. I am encouraged that some people in the Senate on both sides of the political aisle have expressed the gravest of reservations about this House bill. But if the special interests should get it through the Senate as well in the way that the House passed it, I will certainly have no choice but to veto it. And I will do it happily and gladly for the quality of water in this country.

A big part of the American dream goes way beyond economics and has to do with the preservation of our liberties and the stewardship of our land. This is a part of the American dream. The stories these children told me this morning about the dreams they have for clean water and a clean environment and growing up in an America where they'll be able to take their children to places like Pierce Mill, that's a big part of the American dream. A lot of people sacrificed to give us this dream. And we shouldn't squander it in a momentary lunge away from common sense and the common direction the American people have been taking for a generation now.

Teddy Roosevelt said the Nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation, increased and not impaired in value.

Now, let's get away even from the beauties of the stream. Look at this—every time I give a talk they give me one of these—[laughter]—because they're afraid I'll get hoarse or need it otherwise. We take this for granted. It's clean. It's safe. It's available to everyone. It won't make us sick. We have to have it to survive. Our lives depend on it. Why in the world would we do anything, anything at all, which would take away the simple security of the safety of this water from our children, ourselves, and our future.

Ladies and gentlemen, this does not have to be a political issue. For 25 years, it has not been a partisan issue. We are seeing in this area a dramatic, unusual, unwarranted departure from the commonsense course that has kept America moving toward a cleaner environment and a better tomorrow.

Let's get back on course. That's the real progressive future.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:37 a.m. at Pierce Mill in Rock Creek Park. In his remarks, he referred to Robert Stanton, Regional Director, National Capital Region, National Park Service; and Michael Brown, Assistant Superintendent, Rock Creek Park.

### **Remarks at the United States Air Force Academy Commencement Ceremony in Colorado Springs, Colorado**

*May 31, 1995*

**The President.** Thank you very much, General Stein.

**Audience member.** Soo-o-ey! [Laughter]

**The President.** That's my home State cheer, for those of you unused to foreign languages being spoken here in Falcon Stadium. [Laughter] Thank you very much.

General Stein, thank you. Secretary Widnall, General Fogleman, Governor Romer, Congressman Ramstad; to the distinguished faculty and staff; to the proud parents, family, and friends; to the members of the Cadet Wing: We gather here to celebrate this very important moment in your life and in the life of our Nation. Gentlemen and gentleladies of this class, the Pride of '95, this is your day. And you are only one speech—one pretty short speech—[laughter]—away from being second lieutenants.

I am honored to share this day with some exceptionally accomplished alumni of the Air Force Academy: General Fogleman, the first of your graduates to be the Air Force Chief of Staff; General Hopper, the first African-American graduate of the Academy to serve as the Commandant of Cadets; and a member of my staff, Robert Bell, who is the first graduate of the Air Force Academy to be the Senior Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control at the National Security Council. As I look out at all of you, I imagine it won't be too long before there's a graduate of the Air Force Academy in the Oval Office. If it's all the same to you, I'd like to delay it for just a few years. [Laughter]